

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 181541

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, IR, LE, SY

SUBJECT: IRANIAN QUERY ON LEBANON

REF: TEHRAN 6677

1. YOU CAN INFORM MFA THAT WE BELIEVE SERIOUS EFFORTS ARE UNDER WAY TO FIND A RESOLUTION OF THE PRESENT PROBLEM. AS MFA KNOWS, WE CONTINUE TO BE IN CLOSE AND REGULAR TOUCH WITH ALL CONCERNED QUARTERS, URGING RESTRAINT AND PATIENCE. CHAMOUN HAS BEEN ISSUING SOME STRONG STATEMENTS INDICATING THERE WILL BE NO COMPROMISE WITH THE SYRIANS. HE AND OTHER CHRISTIAN RIGHTISTS APPEAR DETERMINED THAT SYRIAN FORCES WITHDRAW COMPLETELY FROM LEBANON.

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2. AS FOR CHAMOUN'S CLAIMS THAT SYRIA WANTS TO ANNEX LEBANON, YOU SHOULD CAREFULLY POINT OUT THAT WE HAVE BEEN TRYING ALSO TO ASCERTAIN SYRIAN OBJECTIVES. WE DOUBT STRONGLY THAT THEY HOPE TO ANNEX LEBANON OR PART OF THE COUNTRY. SYRIAN LEADERS INSIST TO US AND OTHERS THAT THEY ARE SIMPLY CARRYING OUT THEIR PEACE-KEEPING ROLE IN TRYING TO PRESERVE SECURITY AND LAW AND ORDER ON BEHALF OF THE

SARKIS GOVERNMENT. THEY WANT TO END "ARMED MANIFESTATIONS" ON ALL SIDES. WE BELIEVE THE SYRIANS WOULD LIKE TO LIMIT THE POWER OF THE CHRISTIAN RIGHTISTS AND THEIR MILITIAS BUT PROBABLY RECOGNIZE BY NOW THAT INTERNATIONAL OPINION

AND OTHER FACTORS WOULD NOT ALLOW THEM TO GO TO THE MILITARY LENGTHS SUCH AN OBJECTIVE WOULD REQUIRE. THEY HAVE TOLD US THEY ARE NOT SEEKING MILITIA DISARMAMENT, AND SARKIS HIMSELF HAS MADE CLEAR PUBLICLY THAT SUCH DISARMAMENT IS PROBABLY NOT REALISTIC AT THIS TIME. LEBANESE GOVERNMENT LEADERS SAY TO US THAT THE SYRIANS DO NOT WANT TO CRUSH THE LEBANESE MILITIAS BUT THAT THEY DO WANT TO SEE AN END TO THEIR PROVOCATIONS AGAINST SYRIAN SOLDIERS, AND A CHANGE IN THE POLICIES OF THE CHRISTIAN RIGHTIST LEADERS FROM ONE OF OBSTRUCTIONISM TO SUPPORT FOR SARKIS.

3. AS FOR THE MURDER OF TONY FRANGIE, WE BELIEVE THAT THIS WAS ONE MORE EPISODE IN THE RECENT STRUGGLE BETWEEN FRANGIE AND THE PHALANGE FOR CONTROL OF TRADITIONALLY FEUDAL NORTH LEBANON. FRANGIE HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN CLOSE TO SYRIAN LEADERS. WHAT THE MFA FELT WAS A GROWING RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN FRANGIE AND SYRIA WAS REALLY AN OUTGROWTH OF FRANGIE'S STRONG OPPOSITION TO PHALANGE EFFORTS TO CONTROL HIS FEUDAL DISTRICT, AND A TURNING AWAY FROM THE ANTI-SYRIAN POSITION OF THE LEBANESE CHRISTIAN FRONT.

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4. THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE MURDER OF TONY FRANGIE MAY HAVE HAD IN MIND DEALING A SIDE BLOW AT SYRIA, BUT THIS PROBABLY WAS NOT THEIR PRINCIPAL AIM.

5. OUR VIEW IS THAT IRANIANS COULD CONTINUE TO PLAY A HELPFUL ROLE BY STRONGLY COUNSELING RESTRAINT ON THEIR CHRISTIAN CONTACTS, MEANING AN END TO MILITARY PROVOCATIONS. ON THE WHOLE, SYRIANS ARE BEHAVING WITH RESTRAINT. THIS COULD CHANGE IF THE CHRISTIANS MOUNT A MAJOR MILITARY CHALLENGE. THANK THE IRANIANS FOR THEIR PREVIOUS HELPFUL EFFORTS (PARA 2 REFTEL). CHRISTOPHER

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